

1984

## Carlyle's Reception and Influence in Sweden

Erik Frykman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Frykman, Erik (1984) "Carlyle's Reception and Influence in Sweden," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol19/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [digres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:digres@mailbox.sc.edu).

*Erik Frykman*

## Carlyle's Reception and Influence in Sweden



Of the great nineteenth-century British writers two won immediate fame in Sweden: Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott. In the latter half of the century a new impetus was given to Byron's Swedish popularity through an excellent translation of *Don Juan* (by C.W.A. Strandberg) and through Georg Brandes's *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*, where the influential Danish critic idealized Byron and gave him a central role in the development towards freedom from prejudices and conventions.<sup>1</sup>

Scott's rapidly established reputation survived some pretty poor early translations. He was frequently discussed by Swedish critics and there were numerous imitations of his novels by greater and lesser lights.<sup>2</sup> In a period of reaction against naturalism in literature towards the end of the century one of the country's great poets, Gustaf Fröding, wrote two poems in which he reminisced nostalgically about his early reading of Scott. However, Fröding, a liberal and a man frowned upon by "the unco' guid," felt greater kinship with Byron and particularly with Burns, some of whose poems he translated and on whom he wrote a very readable essay.

Fröding spent some time in a German rest-home in the hope of curing his depressions and alcoholism. From there he wrote to one of his sisters:

At the moment I am reading *The French Revolution* by Carlyle--a very remarkable book indeed, original in every word. Mr Carlyle is clearly a man out of the ordinary and it is both entertaining and strange to observe the kind of absolutely personal intercourse he has with his subject--satirically scornful, impassioned as if he were a contemporary living through it all, yet somehow a superb judge of it.<sup>3</sup>

It is not clear if Fröding read the work in the original or in a translation, German or perhaps indeed Swedish, for it had in fact been translated into Swedish a few years earlier, somewhat late in the day.<sup>4</sup>

That Carlyle never achieved the same reputation in Sweden as Scott did is not very remarkable. Nevertheless, the extent and nature of his Swedish fame is interesting and a matter for thought. The aim of this paper is to map his Swedish reception and influence, without any claim to an absolutely complete covering of either, and to suggest some reasons for the by no means insignificant interest taken in his work and person.

It must be taken into account that Sweden had been culturally more orientated towards France and Germany than towards Britain although a very notable increase in the interest in English literature took place with the advent of Byron and Scott on the literary scene. Besides, it was only in the course of the nineteenth century that English came to be generally acknowledged as an important foreign language in schools. It is, of course, impossible to estimate the number of Swedes who would have been able to read Carlyle in the original at the time, but it is entirely possible to say that a few years' instruction in English at school would not have made the reading of a writer like Carlyle an easy pursuit. Translations would have been a necessary condition for widespread knowledge about him, and translations were late in making their appearance.

Carlyle's major works were received with different degrees of attention and enthusiasm. It may not be very surprising that works like *Chartism*, *Past and Present*, and *Latter-Day Pamphlets* got comparatively few mentions, in view of the fact that the social and political scenes that Carlyle painted in them were largely unfamiliar. Poverty there certainly was in Sweden, but there had been nothing quite like the Hungry Forties. The Industrial Revolution came much later to Sweden and never hit the country in the same way that it did Britain; no monstrous towns grew up, for instance. Idle, game-preserving aristocracy was hardly a very noticeable segment of the

population, nor were there many Plugsons of Undershot. No organized labor movement existed before the last quarter of the century. There were no glorious Middle Ages to enthuse about, nor an Empire to take care of, no Governor Eyre, no nigger question.

The first Swedish writer to have taken notice of Carlyle was, not surprisingly, a person committed to social reform and with some first-hand knowledge of England: the internationally well-known novelist and pioneer for women's rights Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865). She travelled extensively in Europe and the United States, where she met Emerson, Hawthorne, and Longfellow. Some of her novels were translated into English by Mary Howitt in the forties. She was much talked of in Britain and her novels reviewed in major and minor periodicals. She visited England, on her way back to Sweden from a two-year stay in the States, in the autumn of 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, and wrote reports of her impressions to a Stockholm daily, *Aftonbladet*. Let it be said that to our national shame these very readable letters were not published in book-form in Swedish until 1922 (*England om hösten 1851*, "England in the Autumn of 1851") whereas there were contemporary translations in English, German, Dutch, Danish, and Polish.

In one of the letters Bremer mentions and briefly assesses a number of English authors (no other country has such a wealth of good writers just now, she says), including Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Bulwer Lytton, Elizabeth Gaskell and Kingsley; the last two were among the people she met during her visit. To the list she adds Carlyle, whom she calls a fulminating John the Baptist, "baptizing every one who comes to him in the purifying river of truth; a purifying but not a regenerating force--powerless in that respect."<sup>5</sup> She does not really make clear what she means by this--possibly that she found Carlyle deficient in proposals for social and political reform.

In a discussion of socialism (where she says that people like Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen are not to be looked upon as bugbears by sensible people) she quotes from *On Heroes* and calls Carlyle one of the great fighters on this earth. In her letters she seems to refer to him only once (letter of 13th Sept., 1852). She quotes in passing one of his sarcastic belittlements of poetry-writing; she also calls him "England's critical Hercules" and quotes one of his skeptical statements about America. But she did not contact him while in London. An editor's note to one of her letters says she did not care to do so since Emerson in person had made her familiar with

Carlyle, reading aloud to her from his own English journals: "It was the kind of thing," she says, "that I shall never forget."<sup>6</sup>

The late arrival of translations of Carlyle's works is not exceptional. Several major writers were sparingly translated; then as now front-rank eminence in the world of letters was no guarantee for popularity. Bulwer Lytton and Wilkie Collins were much better known, because much better taken care of by Swedish publishers, than were Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, and Thackeray. (Dickens on the other hand was viable on the book market.) The first Swedish version of *The French Revolution* (1884-5, see footnote 4) was followed in 1901-3 by translations of *Past and Present* (*Forntid och nutid*), *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (*Om hjältar, hjältedyrkan och hjältebragder i historien*), and *Sartor Resartus* (same title in Swedish), all done by Ellen Rydin, who also brought out, in 1906, a Carlyle anthology to which she gave the title *Arbeta och förtvifla icke!*, i.e. "Work and Despair Not", the words that Carlyle had used in a translation of a poem by Goethe.<sup>7</sup> Finally there followed in 1930-1 the three-volume translation of *The French Revolution* (*Den franska revolutionen*) by Alf Ahlberg (1892-1979), a well-known popularizer of philosophy and folk-high-school principal.<sup>8</sup>

It should be mentioned by the way that the other Scandinavian countries were not better served than Sweden. A Norwegian, Vilhelm Troye, published a life-and-works monograph in Bergen in 1889 and also translated *On Heroes* (1888) and extracts from *The French Revolution* (1890). In Denmark a liberal clergyman and assiduous translator, Uffe Birkedal (1852-1931), gave renderings of *Past and Present* (1892; new ed. 1916), *Sartor Resartus* (1916), and *The French Revolution* (1917; new ed. 1926). *On Heroes* was translated by Margrethe Scharling Dragsdahl and Christoffer Dragsdahl in 1916, and the same couple published a selection in Danish of the love letters of Carlyle and Jane Welsh in 1925. It had been preceded by Jens Kure's *Thomas Carlyle og hans Hustru* ("Thomas Carlyle and His Wife") in 1912--as far as I have been able to find the only book-length monograph on Carlyle in Denmark. The subtitle calls it a concise survey of Carlyle's development and his philosophy of life, and an attempt at rehabilitation, which indicates that Kure took sides against Froude. A few articles introducing Carlyle's life and works were also published in Denmark in the wake of Froude's *Life*.

The first Swedish article about Carlyle that I have been able to trace was written by Frigga Carlberg, one of the lead-

ing feminists and social workers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It appeared, titled "Thomas Carlyle," in *Ord och bild* (vol. 4, 1895). It follows a traditional pattern of reviews of the period in that it consists very largely of lengthy extracts (in Swedish) with brief connecting remarks and assessments; but it may well have been useful as an introduction because Carlyle's own voice could be heard in it and because it appeared in a periodical of considerable repute (*Ord och bild* had been started in 1892 and still exists). There are extracts from several of Carlyle's major works; it is to Frigga Carlberg's credit that she seems to be one of the few Swedish writers on Carlyle to have paid attention to *Chartism*.

She sees it as evidence of Carlyle's greatness that he was able to write with sympathy about Burns although so different from him. The connecting link between them, she argues, is their hatred of cant and hypocrisy. She also finds that Carlyle judges people by their sincerity of intention almost to a fault and that he can therefore be remarkably appreciative of unlovable characters like Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia.

It appears that, to judge by the number of publications, the chief period of attention given to Carlyle in the Scandinavian countries is the very end of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the present century. In Sweden there appeared between 1900 and 1930, in addition to the translations referred to above, at least three important essays, a modest biographical monograph, and a remarkable doctoral dissertation, of all of which more later.

But before that Carlyle had exerted his influence, and a very marked influence, on one of the major Swedish writers, with Strindberg the only internationally-known author of the period, namely Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940). Like her distant relative Gustaf Fröding she grew up in Värmland, the beautiful district east of the Norwegian border (on the latitude of the Oslo Fiord); a country of hills, forests, lakes, farms and country houses, and important in the nineteenth century for its timber and iron industries. Unlike Fröding, Selma Lagerlöf was well accepted by the Establishment: a doctor honoris causa in 1907, Nobel Prize winner in 1909, first woman member of the Swedish Academy in 1914; an author some of whose works were translated into a large number of languages. She was an avid reader and listener to stories in her childhood and youth, eager to write but uncertain of her ability. Like Hans Andersen before her she was initially hoping to make her mark in a different medium (poetry) from the one in which she was eventually to triumph. It was the chance acquaintance with works

by Carlyle that became the turning-point in her life.

She told the story long after she had achieved her fame, in an essay which she called "I jättens fotspår" ("In the Giant's Footsteps").<sup>9</sup> In the early eighties, when she was a student at the teachers' training college for women founded in Stockholm by Fredrika Bremer, she came across a copy of *On Heroes* which Fredrika Bremer had brought back from her American tour in 1849-51. She had no idea who the author was; she took the book out of the college library to read during the holidays. She sat down to it on a rainy day and was immediately carried away by it. She was already familiar with many of the great contemporary or near-contemporary authors--she mentions Dickens, Thackeray, Flaubert, Turgeniev and Tolstoy, Ibsen and Bjørnson, Hans Andersen and others--but this was something entirely different: sentences like volcanic eruptions, rich imagery, pronouncements as if uttered by Old Testament prophets. "To be able to write straight from one's heart, to talk to the reader without restraint and embarrassment, to give vent to hatred and scorn, love and wisdom in an imaginative, brilliant style--this I found a precious gift."<sup>10</sup>

Selma Lagerlöf felt liberated--in her youthful lack of self-confidence she had believed that one had to conform to literary models; now she felt that she might do what this man Carlyle did. "It may sound presumptuous," she says, "but keep in mind that I knew nothing about his greatness. I had no idea whether his style was admired or, on the contrary, criticized as bizarre and strange."<sup>11</sup> She read and re-read *On Heroes* that summer; back at college she wrote an essay on Cromwell as represented by Carlyle in the book, attempting to imitate his manner: "Need I say that the result was disastrous and that it made my teacher greatly concerned about me?"<sup>12</sup>

A few years passed. As a teacher far from home, in the extreme south of Sweden, she came across a copy of *Franska revolutionen* in the local bookshop, browsed through it and was again filled with immediate enthusiasm. A story about Värmland in the recent past had been taking shape in her mind, but she had not been able to give it final shape. A saddening event served as a catalyst: the country house in which she had grown up had to be sold, and the nostalgia and sense of deprivation set her going. She finished a long chapter in a couple of hours and others followed almost effortlessly: "What at that time I called using my own personal style meant letting my imagination boldly lead me on, following Carlyle's example."<sup>13</sup>

Thus her first great novel, *Gösta Berlings saga*, was born. At the end of her essay she mentions that later on, when the

book had been acclaimed, she used to tell friends and literary critics of her debt to Carlyle, but nobody seemed to believe her. The first critical mentions of Carlyle's influence on her were in fact sketchy and were made because she had pointed it out herself. In the essay she made it quite clear that what had made a strong initial impression on her was Carlyle's style.

*Gösta Berlings saga* is a fascinating mixture of coherent plot and detached, episodic incidents. It is given coherence by the recurrence of some central characters and by Selma Lagerlöf's blend of emotionalism (sometimes deteriorating into sentimental romanticism), her sense of legend and tradition, and her astounding insight into human nature, not least its tragic or pathetic aspects. The title character is a young, handsome, flamboyant but irregular clergyman who is defrocked and for a time becomes one of a circle of irresponsible, parasitical gentlemen of varying ages and backgrounds, whom the author called "cavaliers" (Swedish 'kavaljerer')--as she uses the word it suggests, among other things, extravagance and eccentricity. Some of them serve as illustrations of her insight into human tragedy, which is no less in evidence than her enthusiasm for heroic deeds, lavish conviviality and romantic love. Her attitude to the cavaliers is divided: in the period of sober, skeptical positivism and pessimistic naturalism in which the novel was conceived, they represented to her the *joie de vivre* of the old spacious days. At the same time, since the author was also a serious-minded person, they are seen as subversive of good order, progress, a sense of duty and hard work--in the long run unacceptable lords of misrule.

The first critic to realize fully Selma Lagerlöf's debt to Carlyle was Fredrik Böök in *Sveriges moderna litteratur* (1921), published three years before her tribute to Carlyle. Böök was at that time Professor of Literature at Lund University. His comparison is based on *The French Revolution* and *Gösta Berlings saga* only. His point of departure is the "lyrical-subjective" style characteristic of both, exclamatory and full of apostrophes both to the characters and to the readers. But he finds, justifiably, that Carlyle's influence transcends merely stylistic components: Selma Lagerlöf has the same kind of admiration of brilliant and heroic characters and like Carlyle sees the incalculable and irrational in human nature. She excels in graphic, turbulent scenes and it seems evident that she had been impressed by some of the mass scenes in *The French Revolution*. Her problem was, of course, that Värmland was a sparsely populated part of the world and, as Böök points out, she failed to achieve Carlyle's grandiose effects. But



like him she shows how a mob is easily swayed by a persuasive speaker's eloquence and, also like him, she sees the true nature of an individual most fully revealed in action. Curiously, since Böök discusses the end of the novel with its message of responsibility, sacrifice, and toil, he fails to draw the parallel with Carlyle--possibly because of unfamiliarity with his other works. It is noticeable, for instance, that he does not mention *Sartor* or *On Heroes*.

Research into Selma Lagerlöf's life and works had a peak period in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, when a number of important doctoral dissertations, other book-length studies, and a considerable number of articles were published about her.<sup>14</sup> These later critics are all indebted to Böök's pioneering analysis which they seldom contradict but often modify and amplify. They appear better read in other works by Carlyle (though by no means all of them). Some of the authors made detailed studies of works by Selma Lagerlöf other than *Gösta Berlings saga*. They are aware also of other sources of inspiration, partly due to information yielded by the author in her letters. Thus for instance Bengt Ek points to a letter of 1931 in which Selma Lagerlöf said, à propos of a suggested influence from Hans Andersen, that she had found him impossible to imitate and that instead she "followed other models, particularly Carlyle and the Icelandic sagas." A letter of 1891, also quoted by Ek, shows that the author had *Nial's saga* in mind when *Gösta Berlings saga* was conceived: "I wished to achieve something similar, with large flocks of people and grand fights at decisive moments."<sup>15</sup> It has also been pointed out, especially by Erland Lagerroth in his dissertation, that Selma Lagerlöf acknowledged her debt to the great contemporary Norwegian writers, whose works often described dynamic, turbulent processes of nature, sometimes but not necessarily with a metaphorical intent, and that other influences may well have been added to that of Carlyle. Several critics have adduced a stylistic heritage common to Carlyle and Lagerlöf, namely the Bible. Professor Gunnar Ahlström (1906-82) in his brilliantly written *Kring Gösta Berlings saga* (1959) points to a large number of recognizable stylistic patterns from various European authors, past and of Lagerlöf's own time, and warns against a too ready acceptance of Carlyle as the exclusive model in the matter of exclamations and apostrophizings: Chateaubriand's *Atala* had been translated in 1882 and Ahlström is able to demonstrate not only stylistic but also thematic connections between it and Selma Lagerlöf's novel. Ahlström emphasizes the ambivalent and contradictory attitudes of the author in her novel but is one of its great admirers. No doubt, he says, you sometimes hear the rustling of leaves from

other books rather than that of trees in her native Värmland. But "for this storyteller there existed no strict lines of demarcation between different kinds of inspiration. Impressions derived from books stored in her subconscious are as true and as much alive as local traditions, haunting childhood memories and later personal experiences."<sup>16</sup>

His work was followed a year later by another penetrating structural and thematic study, the doctoral dissertation of Professor Vivi Edström, *Livets stigar* (the title is identical with one of the chapters of the novel--it means "the paths of life"). On several points Edström's analysis of Carlylean traces is more elaborate than Bök's. She is particularly careful to distinguish between what seems indubitably taken over from Carlyle and what is not attributable to him or in fact quite different from his manner. On the question of style Edström offers at least one observation not made by Bök: Selma Lagerlöf followed Carlyle in introducing some chapters either by "lyrical chords" or meditative preludes. But for all the borrowings of stylistic and narrative devices her tone is quite different: Lagerlöf is never scornful or ironic.

Vivi Edström quotes passages from letters that Selma Lagerlöf wrote to friends in 1891 and 1892 which show that she had the Carlylean ambition to describe a social revolution, and in one of these letters she actually uses a phrase that occurs on at least three occasions in *The French Revolution*: a "culbute générale." Edström points to an interesting parallel in the political backgrounds against which Carlyle's history and the Swedish novel were written: there was widespread fear in Sweden of a workers' revolution, a feeling that had been made acute by various demonstrations and other celebrations in connection with the centenary of the revolution of 1789.

Selma Lagerlöf had an ambivalent attitude to socialism, fearing it while at the same time seeing its justification. She gave expression to these mixed feelings in the novel called *Antikrists mirakler* ("Antichrist's Miracles", 1897), in which the scene is laid in Sicily. In the last analysis it is a profession of faith in the victory of good over evil and in those who give their fellow-beings courage to face their sorrows. Bök said of it that Carlylean moralism was dissolved into mild, tearful sentiment. But the spirit animating the novel is seen in a different light by Arvid Novallius, in his long article in *Bonniers Litterära Magasin* (1941), "Med Selma Lagerlöf i jättens fotspår" ("With S.L. in the Giant's Footsteps"). Novallius gives special emphasis to the reverberation in her works of Carlyle's gospel of selfless work and he

shows convincingly that Carlyle meant much more to her than just a model of style and undaunted preaching.

The article considers *Gösta Berlings saga* as well as the later novel and there are interesting observations on the "cavaliers" also. Novallius notes that they are ranged along a line whose extremes are the hero and the lover of music and he recognizes, perhaps somewhat boldly, the pattern of polarity in which Carlyle had described Luther in *On Heroes*: "Death-defiance on the one hand, and such love of music on the other ...."<sup>17</sup> Novallius also notes that whereas Lagerlöf views the "cavaliers" both lovingly and disapprovingly, her rich Sicilian absentee landlords in *Antikrists mirakler* are equivalent to Carlyle's idle aristocrats. Particularly, then, the article underscores the moral message of toil preached by both authors although in different tones. It should be pointed out, however, that there is a scene in *Gösta Berlings saga* in which one of the female characters exalts love as the most essential thing in life as opposed to the work gospel of her male interlocutor and that the necessity of useful work is most emphatically preached at the end of the novel; secondly that Carlyle's oft-repeated though invariably vague ideal of toil is echoed as a final effect in works by authors of very different temperaments in the late nineteenth century, ranging from Bjørnson and Ibsen to Chekhov.<sup>18</sup>

The kind of brief summary of scholarly work that has been attempted here may be misleading in that the critics discussed could appear to be mere hunters of influences. In fact, they all apply different approaches in their learned discussions of Selma Lagerlöf's works. I have referred to Gunnar Ahlström's words about her to show that in her case the search for sources of literary inspiration is a legitimate pursuit. Lagerlöf was an avid reader; for all she says about Carlyle's liberating influence she felt humble in comparison with great authors past and present.

Another of the Swedish writers dealt with by Böök in *Sveriges Moderna Litteratur* is Per Hallström (1866-1960), poet, novelist, short-story writer and essayist. Böök says that Carlyle was to him an admired master and that he shared Carlyle's admiration of great and harmonious characters and his contempt of sham and half-heartedness.

Hallström was a trained engineer and worked for a while in the United States but returned home disillusioned with modern civilization. During the First World War he was pro-German, but the essay on Carlyle which he published a few years earlier in a book called *Skepnader och tankar* ("Characters and Thoughts," 1910) bears no mark of that--indeed, he introduces

it by deploring the fact that commerce between Britain and Sweden had been so largely what he calls one of "iron, timber, and coal" instead of ideas; he finds it doubly important therefore to make Carlyle better known to his countrymen.

The essay is strongly but not sentimentally emotional and throughout Hallström manages to convey essential aspects, with a minimum of biography. It is obvious that he had followed the rumpus created by Froude's *Life*, but he refuses to be influenced by idle gossip. He pays full tribute both to Jane Welsh and Carlyle, while condemning Carlyle's excessive contempt of what he thought stupidity. But Hallström is at pains to emphasize that Carlyle's hatred and scorn were in fact the reverse side of his worship of what is great and glorious and of the harmonious spirit of some chosen individuals which had not been granted to himself. He praises Carlyle for his graphic scenes and his wonderful intuition in the painting of characters. He is also full of admiration for his style, ranging from "icy contempt and powerful, harsh humour to enthusiasm and tragic greatness."<sup>19</sup> Hallström gives no systematic account of the major works, and the facts presented, however much to the point, are perhaps somewhat too scant to have served as a useful introduction at the time. It should be noticed that he mentions and pays tribute to *Cromwell* and *Frederick the Great*. He finds Carlyle's capacity for reading between the lines in the Cromwell manuscripts admirable and feels that the vividness and sympathy of the portrait of an unlovable character like Frederick's father equals Shakespeare's capacity for empathy. (It might be added here that Hallström is one of the Swedish translators of Shakespeare.)

He feels noticeably uncomfortable about *Latter-Day Pamphlets* though admitting, somewhat unwillingly it would seem, that he had begun to find much truth in them. His somewhat embarrassed dismissal of them leads up to a summing-up of Carlyle. These essays must not, he says, be taken absolutely literally: "It amused him to be teasing and provocative, sometimes as a revolutionary, at other times as a reactionary, but always with deep sincerity and seriousness of feeling."<sup>20</sup>

Another notable although shorter essay of this period is Vilhelm Ekelund's "Carlyle och Emerson" in *Veri similia* (1915). Ekelund (1880-1949), poet, essayist and aphorist, was a student at Lund University and from early on much orientated towards German literature. Among writers who influenced his poetry were Hölderlin, Richard Dehmel and Stefan George. In his later aphorisms and meditations in prose he is, says Professor Erik Hjalmar Linder, "Nietzsche's most loyal disciple in Swedish literature."<sup>21</sup> Like Nietzsche he hated lukewarmness and mass attitudes.

In view of his very conscious preference for a sparse, compressed style his admiration for Carlyle's manner of writing in the early major works is somewhat astounding--though it would seem that he thinks in terms of a combination of style and tone. He finds in them true poetry if by poetry one understands a lyrical inspiration. On the other hand the later works are to him "deserts of outcries, shoutings, cramps, tumult."<sup>22</sup>

Ekelund notes and praises Carlyle's pioneering introduction of German thought and literature in Britain and finds the early essays on German writers excellent. What he admires most is Carlyle's undauntedness, his determination to "make his life and work a great, strong tempest."<sup>23</sup> He compares him in that respect favorably with the harmonious and therefore somewhat too tepid and idyllic Emerson, without however belittling Emerson's influence in his own time. Ekelund shows himself familiar with the Carlyle-Emerson correspondence, which he finds an even more valuable dialogue than the Goethe-Schiller correspondence. His essay is distinguished for seeing Carlyle in a European perspective.

The third important essay of this period was written by a Dane, Edvard Lehmann (1862-1930), who spent a number of years in Sweden. He had begun his academic career in Copenhagen, was Professor of Religion in Berlin from 1910 to 1913 and in Lund from 1913 to 1927. He was the author of a large number of learned works on the history and philosophy of religion, a brilliant essayist also and much sought after in his time as a popular lecturer. His essay on Carlyle appeared in a collection which he called *Män och deras tro* ("Men and their Beliefs," 1920). The other essays deal with Luther, Pascal, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard.

Lehmann's point of departure is John Morley's essay on Carlyle, of which he allows himself to make gentle fun. What earthly use can it be, he asks, to try and refute Carlyle's arguments systematically, point after point? Carlyle must be accepted for what he is, not as a consistent thinker, not as a politician, hardly even as a historian, but as a prophet who, like the Old Testament ones, spoke both of things sublime and of life in the raw. If you take him to your heart you won't mind his contradictions.

However, Lehmann is fully aware of Carlyle's weaknesses and limitations. To him the most aggravating is the distrust of ordinary people's ability to combine for political influence and to exert it in Parliament. Carlyle failed to see that people will no longer be ruled by feudal lords and bishops as in the twelfth century, or by absolute monarchs as in the seventeenth. But, Lehmann goes on to say, he forgot about

this simply because he made it his mission to point to the shortcomings of democracy in no uncertain terms:

If ever a man created a set of moral norms for the electorate and brought home to his fellow-men the responsibility entailed in the election of legislative and executive representatives, that man is Carlyle. Indeed, he is probably the first to have seen the people's participation in government exclusively in terms of responsibility whereas the Liberals saw it rather in terms of a right.<sup>24</sup>

Lehmann characterizes Carlyle as both Romantic and Puritan. He has great respect for his Puritanism which was not one of hidebound orthodoxy; its chief characteristic was serious-mindedness. But Lehmann is also aware that Carlyle was cut off, or chose to cut himself off, from some important cultural fields--that, for instance, pictorial art meant nothing to him.

This well-written and instructive essay brings out many essential aspects of Carlyle's works and like Hallström's article it is not overladen with biographical detail. More than Hallström, Lehmann sketches in the background of social misery that had made the fight against shortsighted egoism and the plea for responsibility on the part of the wealthy and influential one of Carlyle's major concerns. The essay ends in somewhat obtrusive lyrical-religious terms as a tribute to Carlyle's gospel of toil.

The short monograph *Carlyle* published in 1918 in a series called "De största märkesmännen" ("Great Men of Mark") was written by Carl Dymling, a clergyman, secondary school teacher of Religion, and a writer on diverse psychological and religious subjects. A rather innocent piece of work this side of idolatry, it ends emotionally with the scene of Carlyle's funeral where, in tones of moral indignation, the author finds one traitor present: James Anthony Froude.

A major Swedish contribution to Carlyle studies is Knut Hagberg's doctoral dissertation from Lund University, *Thomas Carlyle. Romantik och puritanism i Sartor Resartus* (1925). It is in more than one respect a remarkable pioneering work. It was written at a time when not very much systematic research into Carlyle's works had been done and the author was a twenty-five year old man of indisputable learning. Hagberg never had an academic career. He became a well-known journalist and essayist on literary and historical subjects (includ-

ing a book on Linnaeus published in an English translation in 1952) and on Swedish bird life.

In fact, his thesis strikes one as on the whole essayistic rather than strictly scholarly. Considering the period when it was written Hagberg shows acumen and foresight on certain scholarly issues. He warns, for instance, against a facile identification of Teufelsdröckh's life story with Carlyle's own biography, and also against a mechanical documentation of influences. At the same time he can be curiously uncritical. He deals, for instance, in sweeping national characteristics in order to explain Carlyle's complexity, and he is apt to be cavalierly categorical (Thackeray was, he says, with Carlyle the greatest writer of the period).

Subjective value judgments presented as incontrovertible truths were, of course, a besetting sin at the time. It is easy to see how at times Hagberg follows Matthew Arnold, whom he admired greatly. But his work is remarkable for literary and philosophical perspective and nine years before C.F. Harrold's magisterial *Carlyle and German Thought* Hagberg examined cogently, if less systematically, Carlyle's relationship to German philosophy. He is well aware of Carlyle's limitations, his superficial assimilation of Scottish and German thinkers. In fact, Hagberg finds that Carlyle's romanticism--largely defined by him as a sense of wonder--can be explained as his dependence on the native literary tradition of the English Renaissance, particularly Shakespeare, rather than on contemporary German thought. He sees him as a writer who more than anyone else undermined Lockean intellectualism. He applies to Carlyle F. Brunetière's assessment of Pascal: "Cependant il est mystique, en tant que ce monde n'est pas pour lui que le symbole ou la figure d'un autre; il est mystique en tant qu'il n'est pas positiviste."<sup>25</sup> But his intention is not to demonstrate an influence from Pascal--in so far as there is a literary inspiration behind Carlyle's sense of wonder and man's littleness *sub specie aeternitatis* as expressed in "Natural Supernaturalism" in *Sartor*, Hagberg finds it in the Book of Job.

Before him Edvard Lehmann had characterized Carlyle as both Romantic and Puritan.<sup>26</sup> Hagberg takes his explicit cue from Paul Elmer More, who had called Carlyle both Hindu seer and Hebrew prophet (and Hagberg adds to this Spengler's distinction between the taboo man and the totem man). A passage in which he sums up the duality of Carlyle's outlook is characteristic of his irrepressible urge to trade in superlatives and absolutes:

With the same intensity that Carlyle embraced Puritanism he denied and fought its great consequence: the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The Calvinist who believed that the idolatry of worldly things was the worst of all sins was the same man who wrote the greatest book of the nineteenth century to demonstrate that the world is wonderful, nature beautiful, the firmament over a small town sublime, love for a woman a great and mystical experience. The same man who believed in Calvin's cruel doctrine of predestination proclaimed more enthusiastically than anybody else in modern times the great and inscrutable mystery of man's life and what happens in history; the same man who was akin to Bunyan was also akin to Shakespeare.<sup>27</sup>

However, in order to explain how Carlyle's Puritanism did not develop into sterile Calvinism Hagberg has recourse to a piece of genetic mysticism:

In certain parts of that distant country Scotland Calvinism never seems to have been consistently professed even by the Lowlanders, at least not within the clan [!] who bore the family name of Carlyle....The family feeling was strong enough to burst the framework of Calvinism and to make the members of the clan Romantics.<sup>28</sup>

There are, then, obvious immaturities in Hagberg's work, but it is not really fair to him to quote them detached from his often very cogent investigation of Puritan elements and their opposites. It should be mentioned also that in spite of frequent superlatives Hagberg is no uncritical admirer of Carlyle: he finds greater insight into man's nature and more humanity in J.S. Mill's *Utilitarianism* than in Teufelsdröckh's message of the Everlasting Yea; and although he does not for a moment believe that Carlyle preaches the thesis that might is right, he finds his panegyric of the history of the Prussian state unattractive: "The wiliness of the fox and the greed of the wolf may be valuable qualities in the struggle for life, but they are hardly incarnations of the divine."<sup>29</sup>

For all its faults Hagberg's study remains a stimulating and often impressive work. It is difficult not to believe that it would not have attracted attention at the time if written in a major language; as it is, it has not even an English summary.<sup>30</sup>



The year in which Hagberg's work appeared, 1925, also saw the publication of an article by S.B. Liljegren, "The Origin of *Sartor Resartus*," in *Palaestra* no. 148.<sup>31</sup> Liljegren's thesis is that *Sartor* "more or less owes its existence to the wish which Carlyle expressed of attacking phenomena like the 'fashionable novel' and the English (and human) mentality by which this novel is conditioned,"<sup>32</sup> and that the germ of the work was the chapter called "The Dandiactal Body." Cogent arguments against this theory are marshalled by G.B. Tennyson in *Sartor Called Resartus* (pp. 132-3). However, Liljegren's article has the merit of adducing evidence for Carlyle's disgust with a particular manifestation of the *Zeitgeist* at the time when the idea of *Sartor* was occupying his mind.

Böök, Ekelund, Ahlberg, Lehmann, Hagberg, and Liljegren were all men with Lund as their academic background, and this is true also of two other contributors to Carlyle studies, namely Frans G. Bengtsson (1894-1954) and Olle Holmberg (1893-1974), the former a learned and witty essayist and novelist, the latter Professor of Literature and an essayist.

Bengtsson's essay--published in the collection called *Silversköldarna* ("The Silver Shields," 1931)--has a characteristic title: "Doktor Dryasdusts vederdeloman" ("Dr. Dryasdust's Antagonist"). Carlyle as an antagonist of unimaginative history-writing is a subject on which Bengtsson was capable of writing lovingly, himself a man with an eye for graphic scenes and for the personalities involved in the historical events. He quotes the paragraph from the second chapter of *The French Revolution* which begins "Sovereigns die and Sovereignties: how all dies and is for a time only..." In it, he says, hardly a fact given by Carlyle is correct and incontrovertible; yet, this is the kind of passage one wants to learn by heart, for its true feeling and breadth of vision. However, Bengtsson's intention is not to suggest that Carlyle had no respect for facts, rather that he knows how to couple it with the free working of the imagination.

It may well be argued that he is over-generous to Carlyle as a historian and unfair to more balanced, professional practitioners. But he writes well and entertainingly on Carlyle's passionate impatience with the unimaginative: "Schopenhauer himself, Carlyle's equal as a virtuoso of style, and animated by a far more fierce anger with his horde of insufferable professors of philosophy, hardly caused heavier thunder to rumble over Hegel's head than did Carlyle's over Dryasdust's." In *Cromwell* and *Frederick* the passages levelled at Dryasdust are "almost equivalent to the choruses in classical drama."<sup>33</sup> It seems likely, by the way, that Bengtsson is one of the few Swedish readers of Carlyle's later histori-

cal works. He ends the essay by giving some concrete examples of Carlyle's power of visualizing historical scenes, not necessarily momentous ones, and of creating wryly humorous effect through grotesque metaphors and comparisons.

Olle Holmberg in "David Hume in Carlyle's Sartor Resartus"<sup>34</sup> argues that some of Teufelsdröckh's opinions are directed not merely against eighteenth-century rationalism but more particularly against Hume. He takes up for discussion Teufelsdröckh's question: "Who am I, what is this ME? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance;--some embodied, visualised Idea of the Eternal Mind? *Cogito, ergo sum*. Alas, poor Cogitator, this takes us but a little way."<sup>35</sup> In turn here, says Holmberg, Carlyle makes his German philosopher indicate three different philosophic stances all of which he later refutes, namely those of Hume, Berkeley, and Descartes in that order. The article does not seem to carry complete conviction; Carlyle emerges as more systematic in his philosophizing than he probably was.

The documentation of material of article or essay length is bedevilled by the fact that a yearly index of articles in Swedish periodicals and newspapers exists only as from 1952. After that date next to nothing seems to have been written in article form on Carlyle, the exception being Olle Holmberg's paper. At least three books of the last forty-odd years contain chapters about Carlyle. Herbert Tingsten (1896-1973), at one time Professor of Political Science in Stockholm, later editor-in-chief of the liberal Stockholm daily *Dagens Nyheter*, has a chapter on Disraeli and Carlyle in *De konservativa idéerna* (1939), in which he emphasizes Carlyle's anti-liberalism, his development from a "half-socialist" to a "decidedly conservative" outlook, his distrust of parliamentary democracy and his elitism. Alone among Swedish writers whom I have managed to locate Tingsten discusses *Shooting Niagara: and After?* and does so factually and dispassionately.

Tingsten also includes a short chapter on Carlyle, "Thomas Carlyle's tragik" in his *Viktorianer och viktorianerna* (1965) where he again outlines Carlyle's development and judges his opinions as expressed in the later essays rather more harshly. He mentions that in our own century Carlyle has been both praised and attacked as one of the forerunners of Nazism, but without offering any comment.<sup>36</sup> It is obvious, however, that Tingsten has great sympathy for the man, with his somatic and psychosomatic handicaps. He finds it not surprising that Carlyle should have combined what he calls de Maistre's tragic view of life and Strindberg's tetchiness and nagging in daily life. He finds that there is little of gentleness,

hopes and dreams and more of contempt and hatred in Carlyle's criticism of society and that not even his heroes are described lovingly--they are presented as cold, hard-working men who castigate their fellow-beings without loving them. Here Tingsten definitely appears to generalize unduly as he does also in his brief consideration of Carlyle's style, which he finds characterized by a passionateness akin to anguish. Even though Tingsten's emphasis is somewhat lopsidedly on the tragedy of Carlyle's life and development, his short essay is remarkable for its compressed and lucid presentation of Carlyle's person and contribution to Victorian thought.

Finally, the present writer's chapter "Thomas Carlyle: överklassvedersakare och antidemokrat" in *De motsägelsefulla viktorianerna* (1980) is also an attempt at a general presentation and evaluation,<sup>37</sup> with an emphasis on Carlyle's complexity.

I cannot claim to have much first-hand knowledge about the interest in Carlyle shown by professional Swedish historians of last century, but I have it on the authority of the chief expert on Swedish historiography, Professor Rolf Torstendahl of Uppsala, kindly given in a letter, that it seems to have been lukewarm. *Historisk tidskrift* vol. 5 (1885) contains a brief review of the translation of *The French Revolution*, contributed by the then editor, Emil Hildebrand. He assumes that the translation had been undertaken in order to introduce a famous writer rather than because of the scholarly merits of the work. Since it was written, says the reviewer, enormous progress had been made in documentation, and even for a general survey of the course of events better studies existed. Besides, the style strains after effect and is "bizarre," sometimes to the point of being insufferable. But Hildebrand admits that Carlyle excels in the powerful evocation of scenes both sublime and burlesque and that he is one of the most original thinkers of his time.

Another Swedish historian, S.J. Boëthius (1850-1924), published *Den franska revolutionen. Dess orsaker och inre historia* in 1887. In a lengthy preface he reviews scholarly works on the subject. About Carlyle's history he says briefly that it appeared before thorough investigations of archival sources had taken place but that the genius of the author is in evidence and will secure his work a place in the literature on the Revolution.

A rather more famous historian, Harald Hjärne (1848-1922), lectured in Uppsala at the end of 1891 on "Socio-political lessons from present-day England" and paid tribute to Carlyle, especially for his suggested measures towards an alleviation of the poverty of the working classes.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up: Carlyle's fame in Sweden was somewhat late in coming. Large-scale attention began to be given to him after the publication of the first Swedish translation of *The French Revolution* (1884-5). Probably there were also echoes of the sensation stirred up by Froude's *Life* even though the biography is likely to have had very few Swedish readers (Selma Lagerlöf is known to have been one of them).

It appears that Carlyle was first appreciated for his power of evoking historical scenes and personages, for his idiosyncratic style and as a coiner of memorable sayings. As such he was given some space in a small anthology of wise saws, *Ledstjärnor* ("Guiding Stars"), published in 1885 by G.J. Keijser, a Doctor of Philosophy and teacher at the training college for women where Selma Lagerlöf was a student in the early eighties. Keijser is known to have exerted some considerable influence as a conveyer of philosophical doctrines and it seems likely that for Selma Lagerlöf he was the person who helped her to see beyond Carlyle's style and into his world of thought.

To the degree that Carlyle was appreciated as a thinker in Sweden this was no doubt due to the positive aspects of his message. His sarcasm and scorn, although often remarked on, were connived at and the attention focussed instead on his admiration of heroic characters, his sympathy with the poor, his preaching of responsibility, and his gospel of work. A contributing factor may well have been that the fear of a Socialist revolution was at work in Sweden, as it had been in Britain in the eighteen-forties. But particularly I should think that Carlyle's message was felt to be a comforting counterbalance to the pessimistic determinism prevalent in one phase of the late nineteenth century, and also in the First-World-War and post-War period with its fear of the dissolution of moral values. This would help to account for the attention given to Carlyle at that time. It might be noted here that liberal theologians like Natanael Beskow (1865-1953) and the internationally influential Archbishop Natan Söderblom (1866-1931) were impressed by Carlyle's moralism. Söderblom liked to quote from him and mentions him in his Gifford lectures given in Edinburgh a few months before his death.<sup>39</sup>

The translation of some of Carlyle's works in the first years of the present century, with the reprinting in the twenties, and the new translation of *The French Revolution* in 1930-31 contributed to the added interest.

From Gustaf Fröding onwards almost everyone who has written on Carlyle in Sweden has remarked on the complexity and contradictoriness of the man and his work. Admiration of his fearlessness, independence, and alertness to social evils has

been tempered by reservations about his egotism in private life, his excessive self-assurance (if it was that), and his reactionary opinions in some of the later works. He does not seem to have been very highly regarded as a historian; comparatively little has been said about *Cromwell* and *Frederick the Great*. Nevertheless *The French Revolution* must have been his most popular work here. *On Heroes* seems more often referred to than *Past and Present*, definitely more than *Chartism*. As for *Sartor*, its style and philosophy in combination may well have been a stumbling-block to many. I have found very occasional mentions only of his essays. "Signs of the Times" and "Characteristics," in which some of his recurring thoughts and phobias were outlined, seem to have passed unnoticed.

Carlyle exerted a decisive influence on at least one major Swedish writer, Selma Lagerlöf, a marked influence also on Per Hallström, and other writers of note were certainly much impressed by him. In research and criticism scholars with Lund University as their academic background have been particularly active. New attention was given to him by scholars of various Swedish universities who did research on Selma Lagerlöf in the fifties and sixties.

It would be misleading to say that his Swedish reputation has lasted well. But the question should then be asked how many readers his works find in other parts of the world, including Britain, nowadays. Even though in recent years there has been a decline in the interest taken in Carlyle's work in Sweden, it is to be hoped that the important research done in the U.S.A., Britain, and elsewhere, and the Duke-Edinburgh edition of the correspondence, will stimulate renewed interest.

*University of Göteborg*

#### NOTES

The present writer is responsible for translations of quotations in the body of the text.

<sup>1</sup>For Byron's reception in Sweden, see my "Byron and Swedish Literature" in *The Byron Journal* (1978), an abbreviated version of "Byron i svensk litteratur" in *Sammlaren*, 98 (1977).

<sup>2</sup>The basic work for Scott's reception in Sweden is Erik Lindström's doctoral dissertation *Walter Scott och den historiska romanen och novellen i Sverige* (Göteborg, 1925).

<sup>3</sup>*Gustaf Frödings brev* I, 1877-1891, eds. G. Michanek and I. Rosenblad (Stockholm, 1981), p. 167.

<sup>4</sup>*Franska Revolutionen*, 3 vols. (Stockholm, 1884-5). The translator was O.W. Alund.

<sup>5</sup>*England om hösten 1851* (Stockholm, 1922), p. 174.

<sup>6</sup>*Fredrika Bremers brev*, ed. Klara Johansson and Ellen Kleman, 4 vols. (Stockholm, 1915-20), 3, 249ff., and 545.

<sup>7</sup>These translations were reprinted in 1922. Carlyle's translation from Goethe occurs at the end of Books II and III of *Past and Present*.

<sup>8</sup>There was a reprint in 1965.

<sup>9</sup>It was first published in 1924. In the collected works it appears in the volume called *Höst* (Stockholm, 1933).

<sup>10</sup>*Höst*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup>Among the most noteworthy are: G. Ahlström, *Kring Gösta Berlings saga* (Stockholm, 1959); V. Edström, *Livets stigar. Tiden, handlingen och livskänslan i Gösta Berlings saga* (Stockholm, 1960); B. Ek, *Selma Lagerlöf efter Gösta Berlings saga* (Stockholm, 1951); E. Lagerroth, *Landskap och natur i Gösta Berlings saga och Nils Holgersson* (Stockholm, 1958); U.B. Lagerroth, *Körkarlen och Bannlyst. Motiv- och idéstudier i Selma Lagerlöfs 10-talsdiktning* (Stockholm, 1963); G. Veidel, *Helgon och gengångare. Gestaltningen av kärlek och rättvisa i Selma Lagerlöfs diktning* (Lund, 1964). Ahlström had previously published *Den underbara resan* (Lund, 1942), about *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*.

<sup>15</sup>B. Ek (see note 9), pp. 176 and 344.

<sup>16</sup>Ahlström, *Kring Gösta Berlings saga*, p. 223.

<sup>17</sup>*Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship* (London, 1959), p. 372.

<sup>18</sup>See for instance the end of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, and the end of Act III of Bjørnson's *En fallitt* ("A Bankruptcy"). The intention is not to suggest that Carlyle is immediately behind such declarations of readiness to put one's shoulder to the wheel. But it may well be that his gospel served as an inspiration in a period of widespread literary pessimism and gloom.

<sup>19</sup>*Skepnader och tankar* (Stockholm, 1910), p. 241.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>21</sup>*Illustrerad svensk litteraturhistoria*, vol. 8, *Fyra decennier av nittonhundratalet* (Stockholm, 1949), p. 197. Professor Linder contributed this volume to the literary history originally edited and written by H. Schück and C. Warburg.

<sup>22</sup>*Veri similia* (Stockholm, 1915), I, 107.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>24</sup>*Män och deras tro* (Lund, 1920), p. 211.

<sup>25</sup>*Thomas Carlyle* (Stockholm, 1925), p. 92.

<sup>26</sup>Hagberg, whose thesis is not remarkable for references, does not acknowledge this; but he mentions Hallström's and Lehmann's essays appreciatively in a postscript. He also refers to a work by Lehmann on different kinds of the religious urge and applies his theories to Carlyle.

<sup>27</sup>*Thomas Carlyle*, pp. 89f.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>30</sup>G.B. Tennyson in his exhaustive bibliographical survey in *Victorian Prose. A Guide to Research*, ed. by David J. De Laura, p. 98, singles it out as the "most impressive separate study of the philosophical dimension of *Sartor*..." Tennyson also refers to it on a couple of occasions in his major study *Sartor Called Resartus*.

<sup>31</sup>A revised version appeared in Liljegren's *Essence and Attitude in English Romanticism* (Uppsala & Leipzig, 1945).

Liljegren, a docent in Lund when the article was first written, later held chairs in English literature in Greifswald and Uppsala.

<sup>32</sup>*Essence and Attitude*, p. 212.

<sup>33</sup>*Silversköldarna* (1931) (Stockholm, 1941), p. 158.

<sup>34</sup>Published in *Kungliga Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundets i Lund Årsberättelse 1933-34* (Lund, 1934). The article is in English.

<sup>35</sup>*Sartor*, Book I, Ch. VIII.

<sup>36</sup>Whether the rather futile discussion about Carlyle as a profascist ever reached Sweden I am unable to say. The only comment that I can offer is the fact that one of Carlyle's most notable defenders, the famous German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), was a refugee from Hitler's Germany in Sweden, where he held a personal chair in Göteborg for a few years before settling in the United States. See his last work, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, 1946).

<sup>37</sup>"Överklassvedersakare" means "castigator of the upper classes," "motsägelsefulla" is meant to suggest the complexity and self-contradictions of some of the Victorians.

<sup>38</sup>Hjärne's lectures are mentioned briefly in R. Andersson's doctoral dissertation *Svenska Dagbladet och det politiska livet 1897-1918* (Uppsala, 1952), p. 22. Dr. Andersson's source is a report of the lectures given in a local newspaper.

<sup>39</sup>The lectures were published by Oxford University Press (1933) as *The Irving God. Basal Forms of Personal Religion*. Beskow had translated a summary of what Leopold Witte wrote about Carlyle's religion as early as 1897, in a serial publication called *Läsning för hemmet* ("Reading for the Home"). I owe the information about Beskow and Söderblom to Docent Öyvind Sjöholm of Uppsala.